130 NEW/OLD ANTIPOEMS AND OTHERS

Erlend E. Jacobsen

Have you this already?

Spring here nearly now —

Bulldozers surrounding —

eg —

130
NEW/OLD ANTIPOEMS
and others

Erlend E. Jacobsen

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(from **77 Antipoems**)

In photographs like the one on the cover, physicists track the essential expressions of matter — and anti-matter. They have penetrated the atom and found not only fundamental particles, but counterparts — anti-particles similar though opposed, and of much briefer duration.

My antipoems attempt to penetrate the self-consciousness with which many modern poets obscure the essential expressions of their poems — to track in words a basic though complex simplicity, that most elusive of all particles — the poem itself.

E. E. J.

No words
But the mind can mark
Our country's alchemy
Transforming his familiar
Transient metal
Deep into gold.

November 22 . . . 25, 1963

I

Love

1

One dark April
Evening by the water
Remembering a girl
I loved, spring
Passed me floating north
Up river.

2

Her stranger's eyes
Just now looked into mine
Then passed forever,
And we both knew
Everything.

3

When she was young
Love touched her body,
And everywhere love touched
Her soul. But she grew older,
And love took longer
To really touch her soul.
Now she is only
Flesh, blood, bone, nerve,
Love and her soul
Have gone away, together.

4

The girl he'd had
Was pregnant, which was funny;
He wasn't however amused
To find in his breakfast egg
Beginnings of a chicken.

5

After six a.m.
Summer adultery
We wear our finest
Hurrying to
Seven-thirty Mass.

6

In dim eclipse
Ojibway Indians
Send fire arrows
At the sun,
Renew its light.
I too must make
Belief suffice
To now rekindle
Your dark love
From mine.

7

Avril tes yeux
Triste pluie de printemps
Fond en fleur mon coeur
Ancien d'hiver.

8

Deliceuse
Sur mes mains
Senteur de ton corps
Je me souviens seulement
Tu es parti.

9

Kissing her he knew
He'd moved ten places up
In his own reserved and private
Waiting line for hell.

10

They had stood
The last time remembering . . .
Two sticks they cast
Lost in the water . . .
And after there had been
A little rain.

11

They were simple things to hate,
The flower's blue
Sunlight against the water . . .
But his leaving
Left her now
Their prisoner.

12

Looking up from friends
In the busy room
He seemed to see
A face he'd loved,
Then, it proving otherwise,
Returned to find himself
With strangers.

13

His love,
Her portrait done,
Her every mood and grace
Within it now,
He found had turned
To paint.

14

Where we lie
Noon melts the world
Blurrs clouds on water
Silences the wind,
And all things fuse
Under the golden
Hammers of the sun.

15

Quick look love there—
Spring meteors are sliding
Down banisters
Of stars.

16

Through summer dusk you run to me
Your careless steps returning you
To little girl again, swinging
Your black hair's plume—
You pierce my world
Until, within my closing arms
Awareness chills your eyes
And wonder turns
To all I earthly knew.

17

As they made love upon the beach
Near midnight
A large bird slowly flew
Against the moon.
"Go home," she cried,
"Something terrible!"
But nothing ever happened;
Only later, he went away.

18

Sad
How writing poems to you
Telling how I can never
Love again
Makes it once true, and so
O.K. to go and do
Just that.

19

Your body's pain
Contracts my world
To points within your eyes;
Now meaning ebbs
From flowers . . . rocks . . . the stars.

20

Loving you
I find
Within
A flower
Opens.

II

Religion

21

In the village church
Stained glass windows
And red candles
Dully glow in darkness;
I turn to go and feel
From many thousand years
The crouching altar block
Against my back.

22

When I was ten,
Midnight Christmas Mass
Was meaningless,
But afterward
Beside the plaster animals
The smell of hay
Was God.

23

Swift slays the sword
Of Christian optimism
Poetry
But spares or misses
My soul hid
Dark as dragons.

24

Sometimes
You know you've got the note,
Can easy push it out
Past people and the walls,
Riding it all the way
Up
For God to listen to.

25

Sunday Mass was always
Pleasant when he found
His favorite patch of red
Through stained glass sunlight
To which he often lifted up
His eyes
In gratitude.

26

Cousin Mort
Hated Sunday Mass,
Giving time and money,
But most of all
His second-cousin once-removed
Lucienne, the basket-passer;
Mort would go, however,
Early for a front pew seat
Where in the empty basket poking by
He'd dump his hundred pennies
And smile about their weight
All the length
Of the long, long church.

27

Tight in our beds
Of lust and love, warm
Out of time's pain,
Our rising breath, our
Bodies fusing for
These seconds' consummation
Here in which
We each
Touch
God.

28

Lowering over Mary
And the creche
Menacingly moves
King Zor
Roaring
Beyond the stable walls,
His green-red-yellow shadow
In the Christ child's eyes
Under the shimmering
Tremendous tree.

29

Still still
On his raging cross
Hangs hangs
The blind thief of the world
All all
His midnight darkness mine.

30

The computer that can't
Be fooled by puns
Has to be
Named God.

31

After God died
Man died too,
Each believing in
The other just
Too late.

III

Spain

32

A nun stands
Guarding over
Little girls bathing
In the still warm
Sunset Spanish sea.

33

Smoke
From the guitar player's
Cigarette
Hangs in steady curls
Over the yellow wood
As below, his fingers
Race, blurring.

34

Around a bend
Of what was road
Across the Pyrenees
There were wildflowers
In the rain, and once
A herd of small wild horses
Stared and bounded
Down what had seemed a cliff.
Guards with guns at stone huts
Watched silently,
And an old man gathered wood.
Below, on lower peaks
Single white perched houses
Tired and lost and waiting
To go on.

35

Driving at evening
Down bare Spanish mountains
Shadows move
Against the crumbled houses;
Locusts sang in the trees
At first, then ceased;
No people, only
Stones and the silence
Until there,
Blue before me as
The sky,
The sea.

36

Hands tight on the rail
Last night on the ship,
The Spaniard stands alone
Trying to smile into
The huge unanswering night.

IV

Science

37

Novae happen often;
Suns, they say
Turn briefly bright,
Tremendous,
Fading back days later.
I say that each
Is no sun but a planet
Of that sun on which
Another race has found
The key into destruction;
When they are gone,
And the light of their going,
We see their sun
Remains.

38

As sure
As clocks run down
And physics is wrong
Always flows hope
Uphill.

39

Puddles turning cold
Skimmed with ice and colder.
Cars crush through
Splashing water at the roadside.
Frozen speed
And weight's concentric shine,
Elipse's mathematics
In the passing of my lights.

40

I'm glad our missiles
Now can navigate
By stars alone
In case destruction's circle
Widens, ending
Guidance from below,
Because there's still time then
Until we bring
Our peril to Orion,
Or the Dragon,
Or the Bear.

41

At eight-thirty
Monday, August fifth,
Nineteen-hundred forty-five
He left his home
Wearing shorts and sandals
The weather warm, clear,
The sky cloudless,
A few birds flying low
Against the wail of sirens;
Instantly, over him,
Quicker than the blink
Across his focused eyes,
Dwarfing the sun, it came,
The sky, the air,
Shocked to incandescence!

At ten
Whispers swept the office;
Secretaries, managers,
Even the vending machine
Repairman hurried off to where
The closed glass doors were open
And, since it was Christmas Eve
And appropriate
The programmers and the engineers
By amplifying resonance
Had altered the computer so
That like some stiff calliope
It played "O Holy Night,"
Then "Jingle Bells"
And afterwards,
"Perdita."

43

The astronomer
Scratching his head
Over a mapped night sky
Discovered he'd confused
His dandruff with the stars
Nor, suddenly, did it matter.

44

Caught into compulsion's drive
Away from parent, womb and home
Must move the astronaut
Past childhood out to death
Poised at last to leave
The primal mother,
Continuing the race's old
Fantastic plunge
Toward immortality.

45

On the atlas
Inflatable like a balloon
Borrowed from
Defense plant work
My children learn the continents
Unaware the faint tape tracks
Linking each to each
Are missile paths.

46

Looking at four
Square acres of computer
"You are machine!" he cried—
But faster than echoes
The metal voice
Answering
"You are data."

47

Learning Enovid a child too late
She kept the bottle by her
On a table where
One afternoon her year-old
Daughter — whose initials
Made AMEN — found them
And learning what she would
Ate all.

48

Night comes to the blind
Cave cricket and
It leaves its cave to prey
As in labs, sea-algae
Minutes from sunset
Through the seasons
In electric dark and shine
Begin their glow.

V

Things

49

To one table
Particular somehow
Among all the empty others,
A hostess
Leads the way
Triumphantly.

50

Ducks rest on
The amazing flatness
Of river
In no wind.

51

Today the flowering
Chestnut tree
Is no poor substitute
For a friend.

52

Separate white
Black, red, yellow
On the sands,
Mingle behind
Flat gray shadows.

53

Notice
How always
Each moth forms
A softly still
Isoceles triangle.

54

Against the window's frost
One last leaf
Stuck by the late November
Storm still summer green.

55

At sorrow feast
My candles all
Weep steady their
Long white
Wax tears.

56

Single pole's
Round light
Turns dark wind
Night tree
To silver shakings.

57

In fields by the wide
Susquehanna River
The abandoned crane tilts down
With all its silent rust
To lift still the world.

58

From winter woods
Through large slow flakes
Three black crows
Flap up, flap up, flap up.

59

I open cabin windows
Wide on dripping
Summer dark and shut
The record off, the rain
Tonight is far more
Beautiful than Bach.

60

Most mine in all
Her singing
Down the strings
The rub and slide
Of faint her fingers.

61

In the garden
The sparrow
Concentrates
On the crumb
Of a great secret.

62

It thrilled him
Carving
The swan's marble neck
To feel so superbly
Inferior.

63

In the silence
Of the ESP class
For no reason
I lean forward
To pick lint from a coat.
Everyone applauds.

64

Outside wooden wind-chimes
Dangle clicking roundly
Turning wind, cold, night
To single sound.

VI

Places

65

In St. Jullienne
Everyone
Is a hundred years old
And the church
Large-mother-like
Walks her clustered
Little-children-houses
In the always Sunday
Sunlit summer morning.

66

I was ten
At the railroad tracks
An old man popped
Out of a freight car
Dusted his clothes
Grabbed my hand
Whispered "You're shaking
With a man!"
And ran away.

67

Like many voices
Through iron grates,
Night under the city,
Deep rain water's
Falling.

68

Down the whirling wind
White papers
Into the creek like birds
Flop to rest.

69

Straight birches close together
Dark shadows on the snow
Horizon to horizon
The unclouded sky . . .
On the superhighway north
The police cruiser waits
By the exit sign that reads:
House Of Correction.

70

Out the train window
Past miles of reeds
Once two rowboats ribs
Ashore like dead amphibians
Rot; a sign flicks past
"The Great Swamp Fight 16 . . ."
Unfinished; blank; gone; rain.

71

Our trains cross apart
From the station as
I wave
And a blonde
From the wrong side of the tracks
Waves back.

72

Out the streaked train window,
Rain-wet asphalt roads
Stretch mostly straight away
Through low red hills,
Looking as though they could only
Lead to loneliness.

73

O lone
Valley ghost
Of an old coal
Locomotive
Whistling
O

74

Winter trees
Bare-limbed
Stretch and sway
Through wind-tides
Like fragile
Feeding
Sea anemones.

75

Down winter's beach
Under a moon
No one watching
Low waves topple
Webs of froth
At endless
Black dune hollows.

76

Between the planks
Of boardwalks
Put down as all the snow
Melts in the Hanover Spring
Tonight there are
Trails of moonlight moving
Everywhere I go.

77

Warm waves south
Low shores lap
Polish bright
And
Polish bright
Splintered bits of moon.

78

Behind us
After the truck
Fiercely hurrying
All the little leaves.

79

After freezing sleet
And wind that bent the trees
Driving home
The sleet has gone
The moon come out
And in the wind
The ice trees spin and crack
Their new strange beauty.

80

After this casual hour on
The train, you turn away
With such a smile!
How can you give so much
And walk away without
Regretting it?

81

Rain's curved lines dot
The dusty glass
Where I stare through
The same train window
On my passing childhood town.
Wheels squeaked on rails
Thirty years ago
But the same rain fell . . .
Which way runs the journey
Crossing from shore to shore
Or only down-river?

82

In the single room
A man and woman sit
Through the hot flat silence
Of the Florida morning
Not looking at each other —
On the electric stove
Water in a small tin kettle
Increases noisily to boil.

83

Out my fast train window
Hills — one with
A country graveyard;
Corn shocks on the next
Carefully set in rows.

84

Behind the boat
Bobbed by the waves
The small wooden toy
Painted blue
Recedes.

85

Cruising through Bahia-Mar
All the millionaires wave back
From their yacht's decks
With smiles
After our sight-seeing boat
Gently toots and names them;
The only negro boy we all see
Fishing
Neither waves nor smiles
And we
Neither wave nor whistle.

86

Out shut train windows at the fog—
Filled tracks where freight cars
Loom, block past, flat squares
High-low rectangles on a world's
Paved dark cement, with
Black wires' overstring,
Intersecting rise and fall in long
Mechanical geometries
So sudden brown-leafed trees appear
Deformed . . . pathetic . . .

87

Through April's wide
Fantastic southern gardens
Through blossoms
Burst like suns,
Like dreams
The three nuns
Glide.

88

In the snow-heaped
Country graveyard
Tracks
Of birds and squirrels
Among the stones
Visiting.

89

Hungry in the zoo
By the cages
I break and eat each peanut
In a small brown paper bag;
Beyond the bars, the bears
All watch and grow angry.

90

Below us on the mountain
A dog at reddening
Sunset barks —
A hundred miles of valleys
Darkly silent lie.

91

At 5:30 p.m. through
The catholicity of my
Motel's television
I dial on Channel 7
The Three Stooges
But find myself relaxing with
The Pope.

92

Straight line
Shortest to two points
But give me
The gracious living of
Parabola.

VII

People

93

Lightly in her hands
She held its hushed wings
Battering
Her voice soft.

94

Busy with his fork
The little boy pursues
Around its can of juice
A piece of peach.

95

Finishing the book in tears
He slammed it shut
Quickly to seal in
All that greatness.

96

At noon
The next-door-neighbor's child
A blonde of three
Wanders to our house;
Her mother
Outdoors-pretty raises
Golden retrievers
Luxurious prize-winners all.
Missing her, her father
Comes angry over.
My silent children watch
Her stumble and be dragged
Across the snow fields where
Golden retrievers
Out for exercise
Shoot like splendid bullets
Everywhere.

97

Danny stuttered
And was slow in school.
One afternoon he walked
A mile to play;
"You're it," my children yelled,
"Count twenty," as they fled.
Minutes later Danny cried
Having gotten twice
To twelve.

98

Pausing, hands on knees
To contemplate his summit
Of climactic argument,
Deeply he inhales—
A passing fly.

99

Ripped out,
The cover girl
Smiles cool lovely
As fireplace flames
Crawl over her.

100

Blonde hair in whirls
She passes
Like an ice chip;
Her Siamese cat follows
Glaring blue-eyed at us,
Mewing soundlessly.

101

Almost silently
The wide white Cadillac
Glides past, driver
In white coat, pale tie
Small white mustache—
Rippling gaily from
Its right rear door
Two-thirds of a pair
Of brief black lacy
Underwear.

102

Often he remembered
The green spider
On the shoveled lumps of coal
He fed the fire with.

103

At the lobster pound
The man who lifts them from the water
Has a red face, his arms
Enormous muscles.

104

Top of the library
Blinking in light
As bells go off
And people rush by
Is suddenly there
Bat-black
A little old woman.

105

At market
The old man
With the bristly beard
Holds two cans of cat food
Eight for a dollar.
Asked if he wants stamps
He shakes his head.

106

Past miles of mountain woods,
In a sudden high clearing,
Acres of rusting cars
Where an old man sitting
Bent on a barrel
Whittles a white stick.

107

"Real jade," she says
A finger to her necklace,
"These diamonds too,"
Fingers through her rings;
"Real ocelot the fur,
Raw silk the dress . . ."
She pauses to apply
Lipstick and powder.

108

At the door
Her dinner guest was dressed
Expensively
But she had not recalled
That he was short as she
Nor that his round blue eyes
Regarding hers
Were only solemn.

109

Pregnant now she walks
Staring at tall chimneys
Wistfully remembering
Stork nests built
On straw-covered roofs
Of her childhood town.

110

Her beauty of that kind
For which one any day
Would pick a strong
Bouquet of toadstools.

111

Gray bird sings
What I must make
With lines left far
From my song.

112

Four angry years old
Punishment over
Stealing away
True to his word
Down through the fields
Surrounded by fireflies
Into the garden
Under the moon
Barefoot stamping
Onto the seedlings
Silently dancing, dancing . . .

113

After dinner
When the negro couple leaves
The other liberal couples
Linger
Over the black and white
Checked tablecloth
Telling nigger jokes.

VIII

Death

114

One day
Down three-mile hill
Riding his bicycle
Into the town
Tea-man Smith
Never came again.

115

So he died
Knowing all his life
Within him the sure
Vague truth
But never quite able
To corner it.

116

In his black cabinet
Under white flowers
Smiles the dead man,
Smiles . . . smiles . . .

117

Last month she told me
The boy she loved had died.
She cried for answers
And was touched with
An immense dignity.
Now, she passes smiling with a friend,
Her hair is bleached another color,
And they tell me she has joined
A sorority.

118

Tonight I must remember
How my mad and only uncle
Laughed, warming himself
Beside bridge embers on
The blackened road that pulled
His curving kingdom toward
Reality's dull shack.

119

In the bowery
Leaving the wake with the body
The Irishmen gather in the bar
Drinking nostalgically;
One by one they leave.
The next-to-last one tells
The barman
Gesturing with his thumb
Toward the last one
Slumped upon his stool,
"He's paying."

120

Death means
Correcting a study
Of T. S. Eliot
Written months ago
By changing tenses.

121

Stare from your husband's small
Town gas station window
Where the winter
Evening nights
Beneath the high
Hard lights
Turn, turning your future
In, into your past.

122

When I was twelve
My mother bore a dead daughter
Whose name would have been Jan;
I seemed then so much older
Than my imminent sister;
Now I am thirty
Yesterday
She would have been
Eighteen.

123

At a corner of the field
He'd worked for fifty years
He drew a rusty scythe blade
Through his throat
That blood might warm at last
This barren land to life.

124

All day
The dead man
Floated
Over the sand
Under the sun
On green water.

125

Deceived by what before
Had always been the sun
The hornet
Strikes the heated bulb
Again and again.

126

Shutting his eyes
At the funeral
Bending his head on his hands
He suddenly heard
Carefully
The ticking of his watch.

Benny, I saw you die
Another witness
As he beat you dead,
Repeated in slow-motion,
Not adding all the times
He hit you,
Knowing together after
It stopped where
Slumping in the ropes
Your senseless head still high
You made that smooth
Extended fall to death.
I wanted you back then
High on some summer
Cuban hill with morning
Childhood butterflies.
But yours was more
Than most I read about,
Small private rituals—
Your show was for us all
Benny — but not alone.

Tonight
An hour ago
A man I grew up calling
Uncle died. I mourn him
Gently remembering pictures of
A thin tall cowboy
Erect on a piebald horse
Out West in 1889.
He thought mostly of that
The last year, pointing to
Proud speechless pictures
Hung on his room-cage
Walls. Here in my night
Hundreds of miles away,
Low in the sky and bright,
Unusually together,
Venus and Jupiter begin
The evening and I wish
Them there for me
Now
As then
For him.

129

I have not thought of it
For several years; today though
I recall how just at noon
In the office next to mine
He fell straight forward
Face to floor, his skin
Gone gray, his face
Unrecognizable.
Afterward it seemed
There had been operations;
They knew though he did not.
We stood to watch him
Dying on the brown-white squares
Of waxed linoleum;
Beyond the window cars
Queued up to leave
The parking lots for lunch—
But I have now forgotten
Both his names.

I am the only customer
In John's Army-Navy store.
Three bare bulbs hang
Above goods piled on tables.
John waits, fat and sixty-three;
His father sits in back
Bent to a red chunk stove.
Outside fat slow flakes fall
Where there are no houses;
Only the river flows on
Over cold stones.

I have:

- been writing poems since 1938 when I was five years old
- graduated from Dartmouth College and Johns Hopkins University
- been married since 1956
- three children
- two other collections of poems: **Four New Poets** — 1957, and **77 Antipoems** — 1964
- taught at: Johns Hopkins University, University of Buffalo, University of New Hampshire, Goddard College (now)
- worked as a technical writer and editor for two years
- ridden motorcycles for 18 years
- a lot of cats.

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